TURNER'S

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

ON THE

BANJO.

FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO HAVE ACQUIRED SOME PROFICIENCY ON THE INSTRUMENT,

THE WHOLE

Profusely Illustrated

With Fingered Diagrams & Special Studies.

BY

AUG. C. CLARK.

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FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

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BANJO

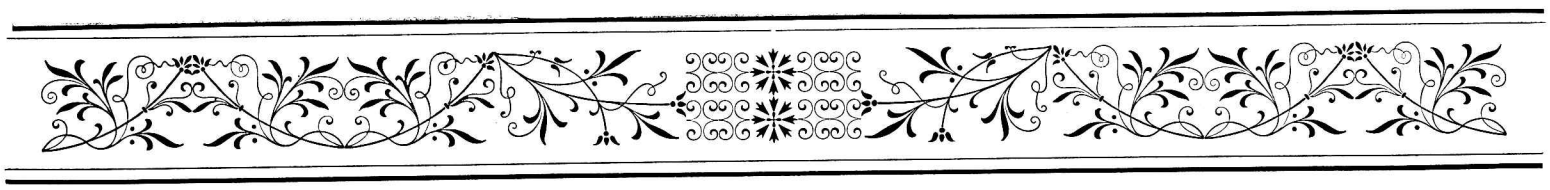
BY

AUGUSTUS C. CLARK.

INTRODUCTION.

So many Books of instructions for the Banjo have been published that in issuing this my idea is not to set forth a complete exposition of the instrument, but rather to fill up the gaps left by former writers on the subject. The work is especially intended for the use of students who have mastered the elementary part, to give brilliancy and facility in execution, and useful hints for the choice and preservation of a good instrument, without which it is impossible to produce such effects as will do justice to the performer.

A.C. CLARK.



THE CHOICE OF A BANJO.

IN choosing a Banjo the principal points to be observed are: (1) the quality of the Vellum; (2) that the Hoop be rigid—see that it is not curled up at all by the strength of the vellum; (3) observe the angle of the Arm, that the Strings lie neither too close nor too high from the fingerboard; (4) the Pegs should fit well and work evenly; and (5) the Frets may be tested as hereafter described.

THE STRINGS.—The next point is to see that one's instrument is fitted with perfect strings, otherwise it is not possible to play in tune. For a Banjo with a thick vellum rather thick guage strings should be used, and *per contra* when a thin vellum is selected, strings should correspond. The thickness of the Third String (G) should be that used for a Violin First. The Second Banjo String should be slightly thinner, and the First and Octave a finer guage still. Avoid having these two "outside" strings *too* fine, as the tone produced is apt to become "tinny," as it is called, and is also likely to be overbalanced by the fuller tone of the others. The Covered String (C) should be carefully chosen, also avoid having it too thin, and let it be simply wire-covered on silk strands, not with a *gut* core as some dealers try to sell, or with a *wire* core—the latter pulling too hard and producing a tone quite out of keeping with the gut strings. Even when strung with wire strings throughout—as in the Zither Banjo—the wire cored C string is not to be recommended. Zither Banjos are best strung with very fine wire First and Octaves, the Second of wire slightly thicker, and the Third of *gut*, as mentioned above.

Some persons are much inconvenienced by the frequent breaking of the thinner gut strings. This may be obviated to a great extent by keeping them very slightly moistened with a little orchestral oil. The process is simple enough: just let a drop or two of oil be applied to a fine rag and run the strings over a few times, being careful not to saturate them. For persons with damp and hot hands (the most frequent cause of breakage), the Japanese grass strings are very durable, although not of such good tone as the gut, and the same applies to the "Acribelle" and the twisted silk, all of which are now made in special sizes for Banjo Firsts and Seconds.

THE BRIDGE.—A great amount of the Tone of the instrument depends on the description of Bridge employed. The best to use is of maple, or similar white and not too hard wood, about $1\frac{1}{8}$ or $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, the notches cut according to the thickness of the respective strings. The height should be regulated according to the "pitch" of the handle, so that the strings lay about one-eighth of an inch off the fingerboard where the hoop and arm meet. This distance should not be exceeded, otherwise the upper positions will be difficult to "stop" easily; whereas, if *less* than this distance there is the danger of the strings jarring by touching the fingerboard when vibrating. The notches for the strings should not be cut too deeply—the projecting wood above is apt to cause jarring if there is any too much space—and, again, if the strings fit tightly in a notch too deep the effect is to "mute" them, and, it is better to have the two outside notches cut *obliquely* instead of straight, there is not then so much tendency for them to be "picked" out during playing: the performer should see that even these apparently slight matters are carefully attended to.

Avoid elegantly finished bridges in fancy shapes, especially those with spreading feet—the feet should be perpendicular, and not too thick, just sufficiently stout to stand the pressure whilst playing without falling over. By the way, a little powdered resin rubbed on the feet of the bridge before fitting the strings is a good preventive against accidents of this kind.

The Position of the Bridge must be regulated so that the open strings sound an octave when stopped on the twelfth fret, or, in other words, this fret should be exactly half-way between the nut and bridge.

THE VELLUM should be of even thickness throughout, smooth and of pleasing appearance. Avoid coarse, rough looking skins. It is more a matter of fancy or fashion than actual value, whether they be quite white, clouded, or clear. The better looking are undoubtedly the white, they are generally—in fact, almost invariably—the skin of the calf, and the best are of American manufacture, those stamped in red with the name, "Rogers," being the finest used. Good imitations are made in England and France, but these are more flabby and will bear almost any amount of stretching, the result being they are never perfectly tight. Great care is required in regulating the tension. No great strain must be applied to any one part of the rim at any time, but all the keys should be turned with an equal but small amount of force; of course, when there are only a few brackets on the instrument more force is required, but it is well to screw all round the hoop several times slightly, rather than to tighten thoroughly one part at a time. Vellums are easily affected by alterations in temperature, easily assimilating moisture in a damp atmosphere so that they should not be tightened in wet weather, else a sudden change to a warm room will frequently burst them.

In tying Knots in these strings, a minute roll of paper can be enclosed in the loop so as to prevent cutting where the Knot is tied, or another good way is to thread a small bead on the end before running it through the tailpiece.

While on this subject of string breakages it may not be out of place to mention that the tailpiece itself is a frequent cause of mishap. This can be easily remedied by passing a piece of the silver string through the holes and working it as a fine file backwards and forwards a few times. This smoothens the opening underneath and prevents any cutting which the hard edge sometimes does. The same should be done to the nut at top of fingerboard should the strings have a tendency to breakage there.

Having found the strings to be properly guaged we must now test them to see that they are perfect throughout, as, notwithstanding their appearance, they may still be "false." This is discovered by sounding the open string and then stopping it at the twelfth fret. When pulling the string again, the note given should be a perfect octave, and this test should be given to each string. It does not, of course, apply to the C string, which could hardly be false owing to its construction, but this string should be sounded to ascertain the correct position of the bridge, in fact, before the gut strings are tried, as if the C string sounds an octave when stopped at the twelfth fret, we may rest assured the bridge is rightly placed. Should any string sound an imperfect octave then it must be replaced, as it will be impossible to play in tune while holding the fingers in the correct position.

FRETS.—There are, unfortunately, many instruments made by persons who seem to regard these marks purely as ornaments, totally regardless of the fact that, to the learner at least, their correct spacing is of absolute importance. If these are not marked accurately the notes necessarily sound out of tune, and where *raised* frets are used, the Banjo is rendered useless. Many instruments, especially of the better class, are only made with fret dots at the side of the arm, and to these, position stars and dots are generally inlaid in the fingerboard. Although a *slight* inaccuracy can be remembered in this case, and the performer can thus obviate the discrepancy, with raised frets it is a different matter, and they should be thoroughly tested in the following way. Tune all the strings perfectly, then see that the note produced on the First String at the Fifth Fret is exactly in unison with the Octave (Thumb, or Short) String. Now try the same string at the twelfth fret, and it should be an octave above the open string. To make sure that there is not likely to be any fault in this particular string, the second, third, and especially the silver string should also be tested on this fret. The first string should also be stopped at the tenth fret, when the note sounded will be exactly two octaves above the open C of the silver string. Other tests will suggest themselves to the student.

ERRATA.—Through a Printer's error, pages 6 and 7 have been transposed. Page 7 should read as page 6, and page 6 as page 7.

The Banjo should also be invariably kept in a case when not used, bags being of little use in preserving the vellum.

THE PEGS should fit the holes bored for them so as to run smoothly without jerking. Slipping may be avoided by applying a little soap and chalk. Take out the peg, then rub with a piece of dry soap; replace them in their respective holes, and work them round several times so as to lubricate both peg and hole, then take them out again and apply some ordinary chalk (billiard chalk is the best), and they will be found then to work well, without slipping or sticking. Resin should never be used, it prevents the free action so necessary for delicate tuning. Whether made of ivory or wood is a matter of choice, and, of course, the former has the best appearance, but ebony is an excellent substitute, and, in fact, is not so liable to slip—one never sees ivory pegs used for a violin, where the slightest inequality in fit would be fatal to facile tuning.

TUNING.—The generality of performers now tune from the third string "G," and by far the simplest way, is to use a Pitch Pipe, (which can be held in the mouth and sounded until in unison with the string, a convenience superior to the piano, unless a piano accompaniment is to be played, when it is, of course, absolutely necessary that the two instruments should be exact) or the tuning fork. After getting the third string in tune, the second string "B" should be a third higher (or in unison with the fourth fret of the third string). Then the first string "D" a third above the second (unison with the third fret second string). Next the short string or octave "G" an octave higher than the third string, and in unison with the fifth fret of the first string. Finally the "C" string a fifth below "G" and an octave below the "C," sounded on the first fret of the second string. Some performers prefer to tune from the "C" string and work upwards, but this although just ascorrect is rather more difficult to do.

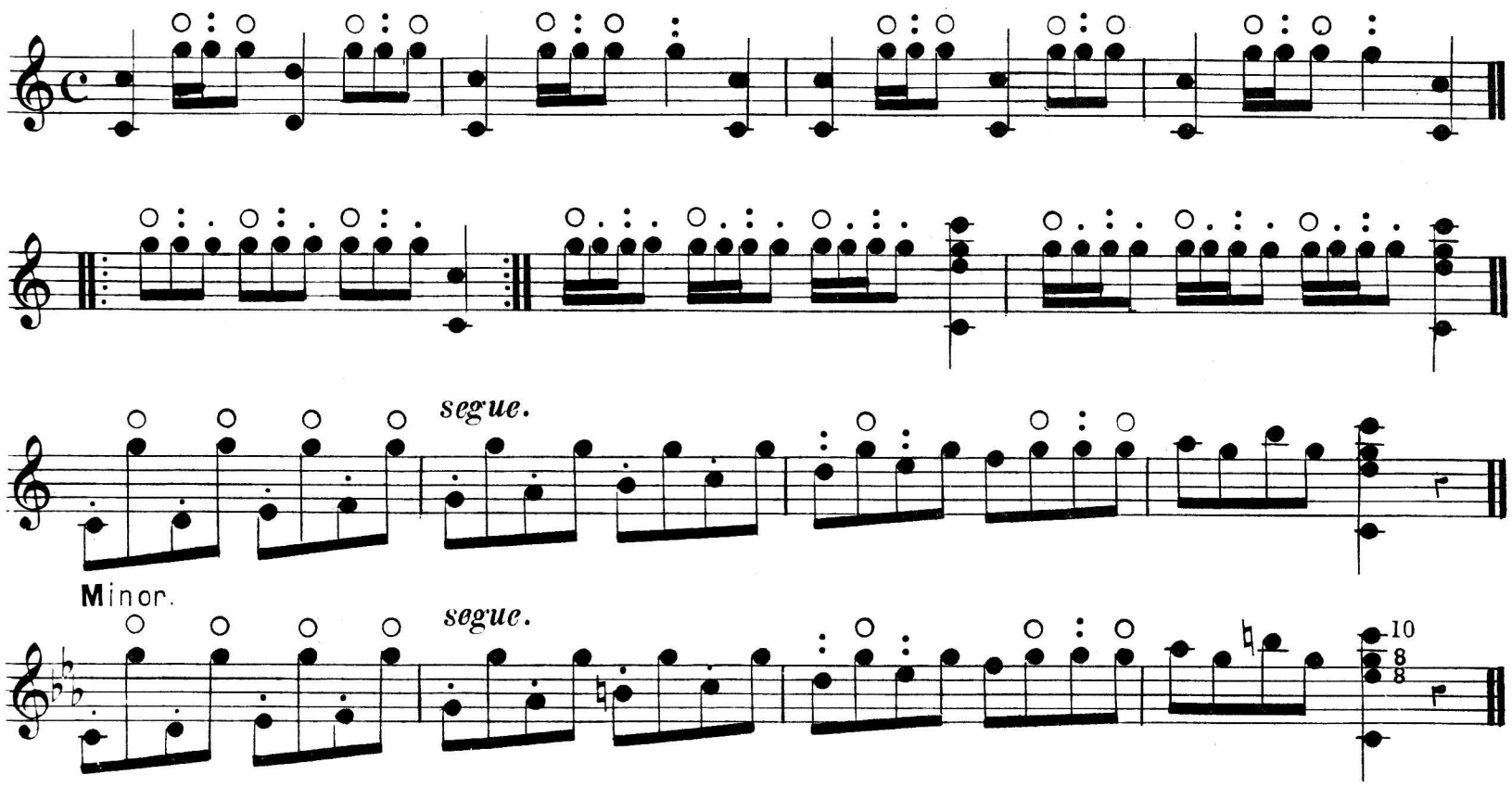
VARIETY OF TONE is produced by changing the position of the Right hand. For *forte* playing the string should be struck firmly close to the Bridge, of course at a sufficient distance to obtain a good vibration, but very effective *piano* or *legato* tones are produced by striking—or rather "pulling"—the strings about ten inches from the Bridge or a little above the junction of the hoop and arm. This is a point much neglected by some performers and for accompaniment playing is extremely pleasing.

MUTING the Banjo can be easily done by placing a coin—a penny for preference—under each foot of the bridge. Those who have never tried this simple effect will be surprised at the Guitar like tones so produced. In Banjos, which are not of the Zither type, it is more easily done by placing a handkerchief or pad between that portion of the handle which passes through the hoop (called the "perch"), and the vellum exactly under the feet of the bridge; this method obviates the trouble of disturbing the bridge.

USE OF THE THUMB STRING—The following example will serve to show the method of fingering groups of **G**s (*octaves*) either in twos, threes, or fours, such phrases frequently occurring.

The dots over the notes shew the fingering for the right hand, one dot representing the first finger, and two the second.

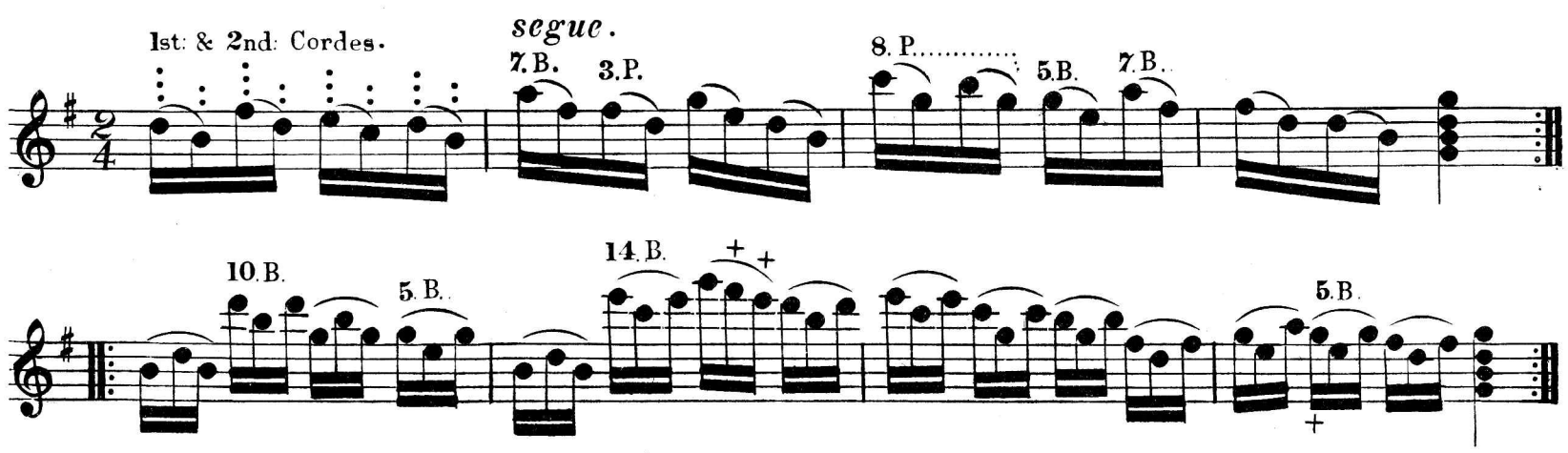
EXAMPLE I.



THE THIRD FINGER—Many students fail to acquire a good touch, on account of the natural weakness of the third finger of the right hand in playing, a difficulty which it is most essential to overcome in order to be able to play chords—giving each string the necessary vibration, so that one does not sound above the others—and in arpeggio passages.

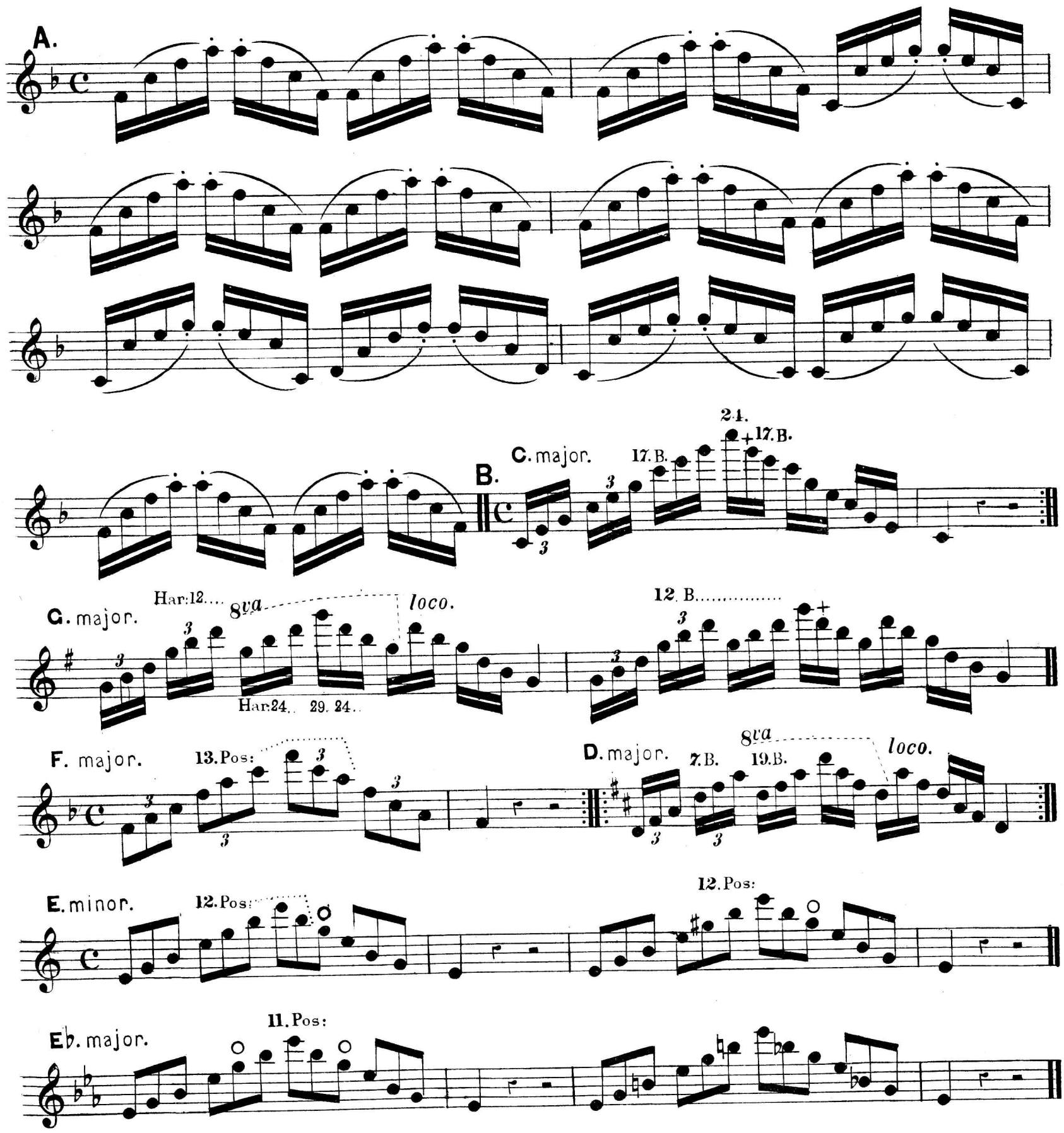
The following exercise is calculated to strengthen the third finger, and should first be practised with the thumb resting on, or touching the octave string and when this is accomplished the first finger should be kept on the **C**. string.

EXAMPLE II.—Notes marked + to be snapped with the left hand.



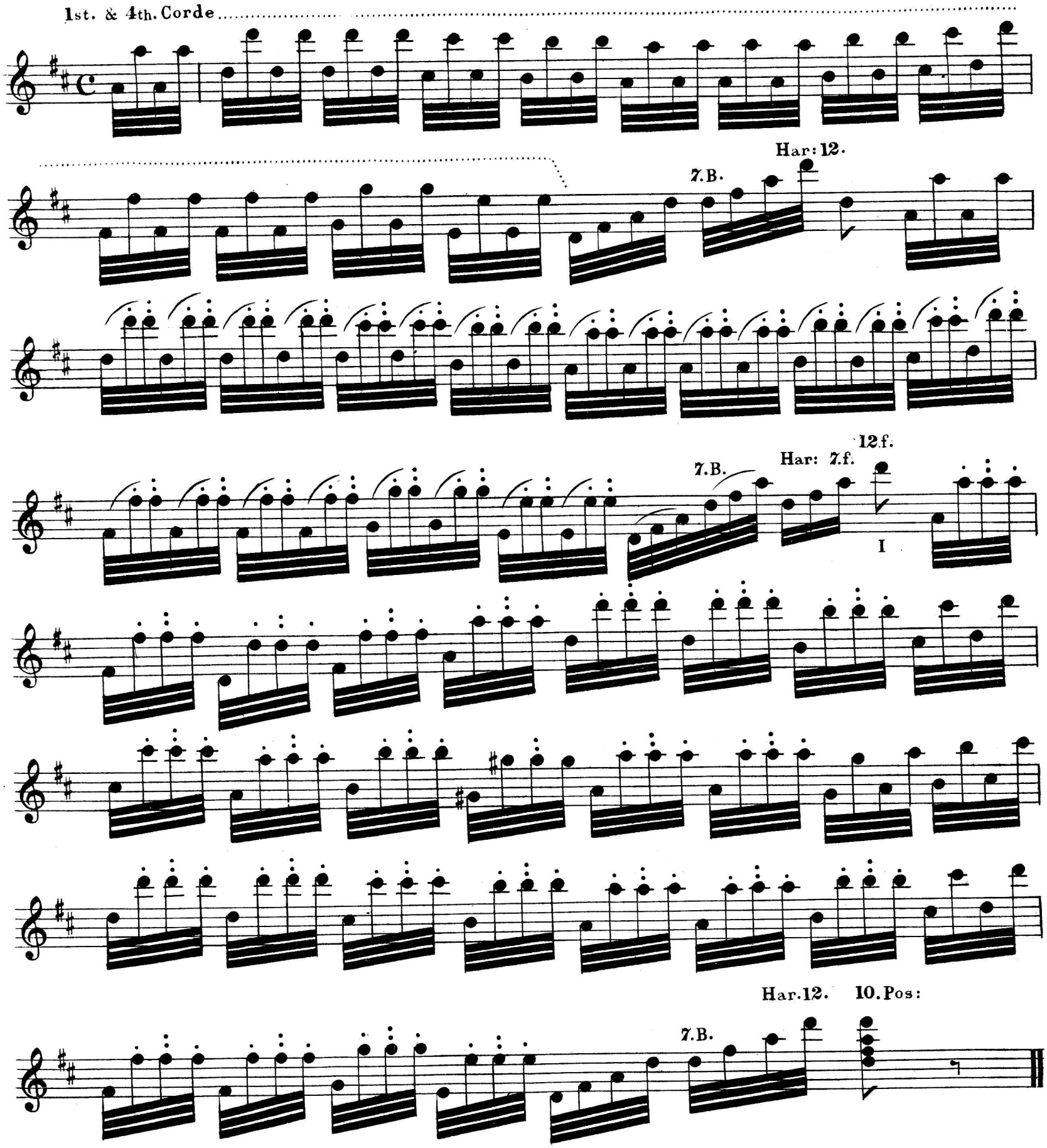
EXAMPLE III.

EXERCISES ON ARPEGGIOS _The left hand fingers must stop the strings for each chord *together* so that the notes may be run over by the right hand quite smoothly.



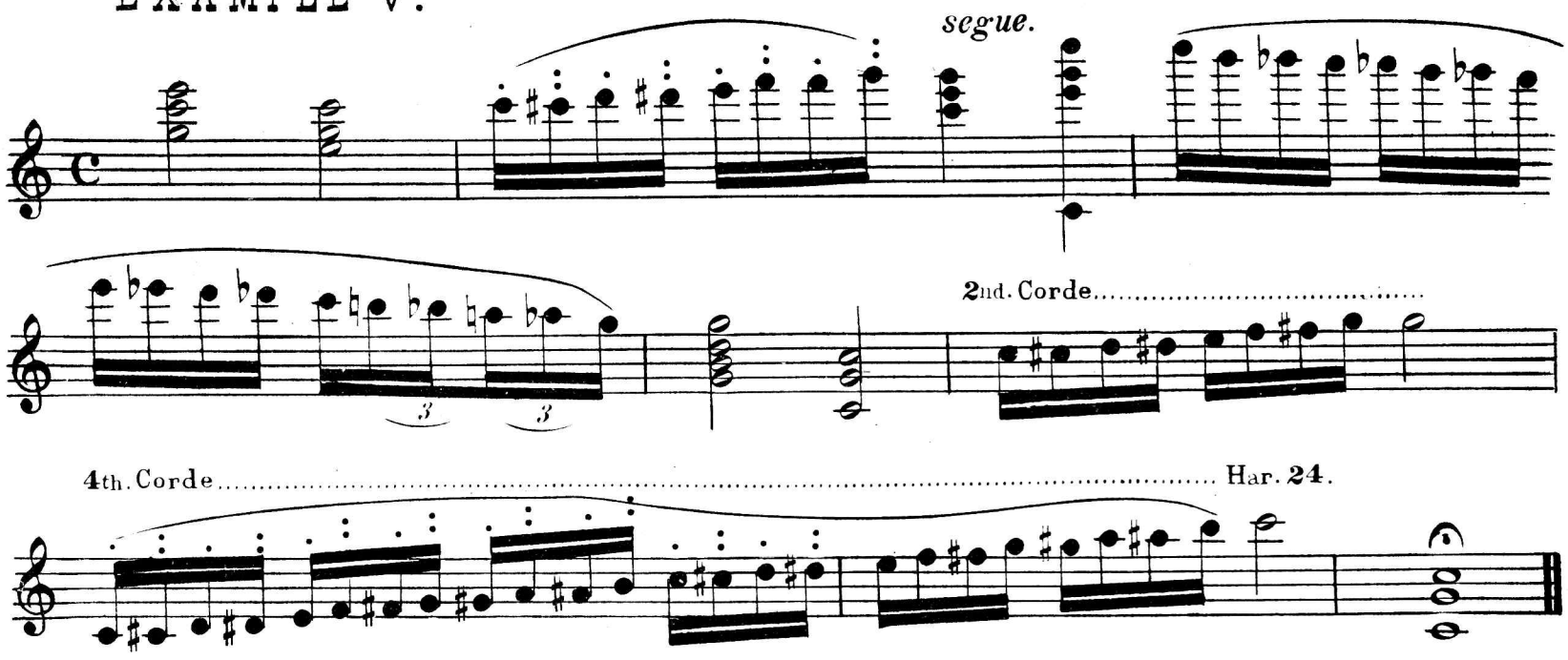
EXAMPLE IV.

OCTAVE PLAYING — Passages in octaves are played by placing the first finger on the first string (at the first fret) and the third finger on the third fret of the **C.** string keeping this distance apart for each octave played. This is in other words playing the open first a **D.** string and stopping the **C.** string at the second fret - making the note **D.** an octave below.



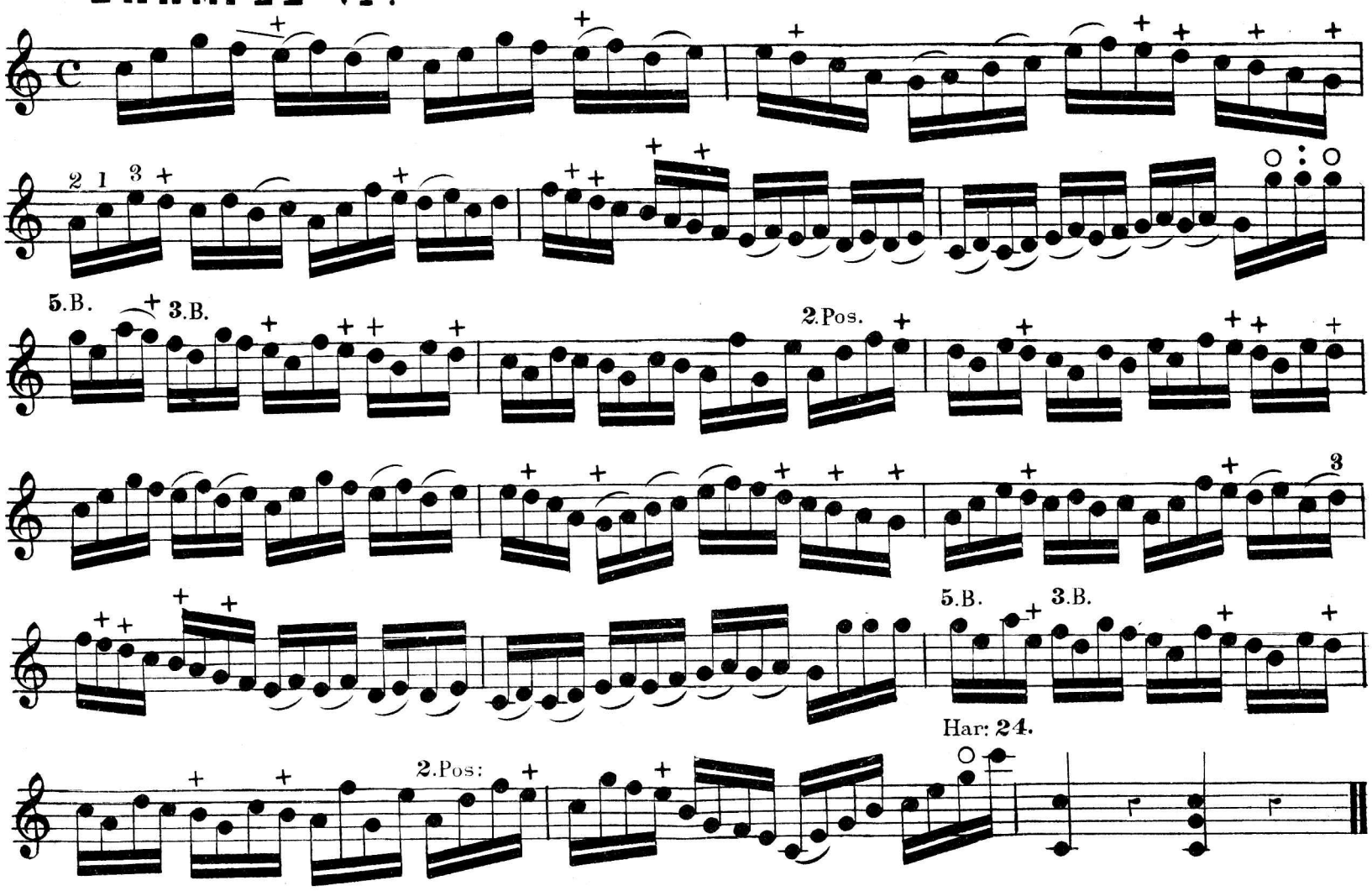
CHROMATIC PASSAGES—Such as occur in Cadenzas, or whenever required to be played rapidly the best method is to slide the finger of the left hand stopping the notes up the string and shake alternately with the first, and second fingers of the right hand as shown and marked in:—

EXAMPLE V.



The following exercise is for strengthening the fingers of the left hand and to give facility in executing quick passages. All the notes marked with a tie are to be slurred and those indicated by a + to be snapped.

EXAMPLE VI.

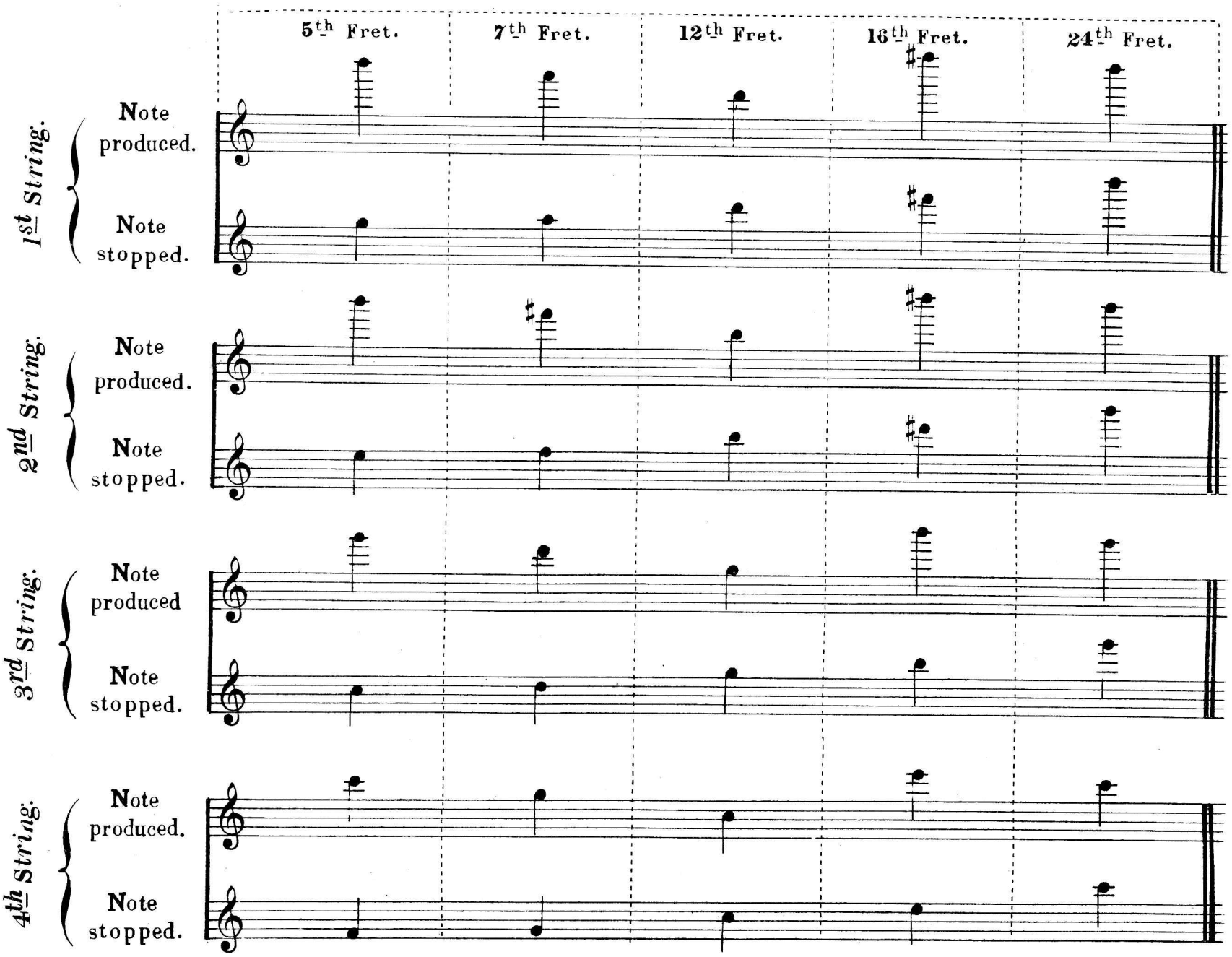


HARMONICS — Natural Harmonics are produced by placing the fleshy part, or "ball" of the finger (generally the second) of the left hand, lightly on the strings exactly over certain frets — taking care not to press the strings, and releasing them immediately the note is given. This requires some little practice, but when clearly and delicately played, the notes emit a most pleasing and bell like tone.

The natural Harmonics most easily produced, are those formed on the 5th; 7th; 12th; 16th; and 24th; frets-or on the thumb string, the 17th; and 29th; frets, which, by the way must be found by practice as of course they are only imaginary — being over the vellum, but a mark can be made with pencil to indicate their position.

Some performers find it easier to produce Harmonics *without the use of the left hand* viz: by placing the tip of the first finger, lightly on the harmonic fret, at the same time striking the string with the *thumb* curled underneath the first finger. This method is not so generally adopted as the former, but it should be practiced to enable the student to more easily play the artificial harmonics described later.

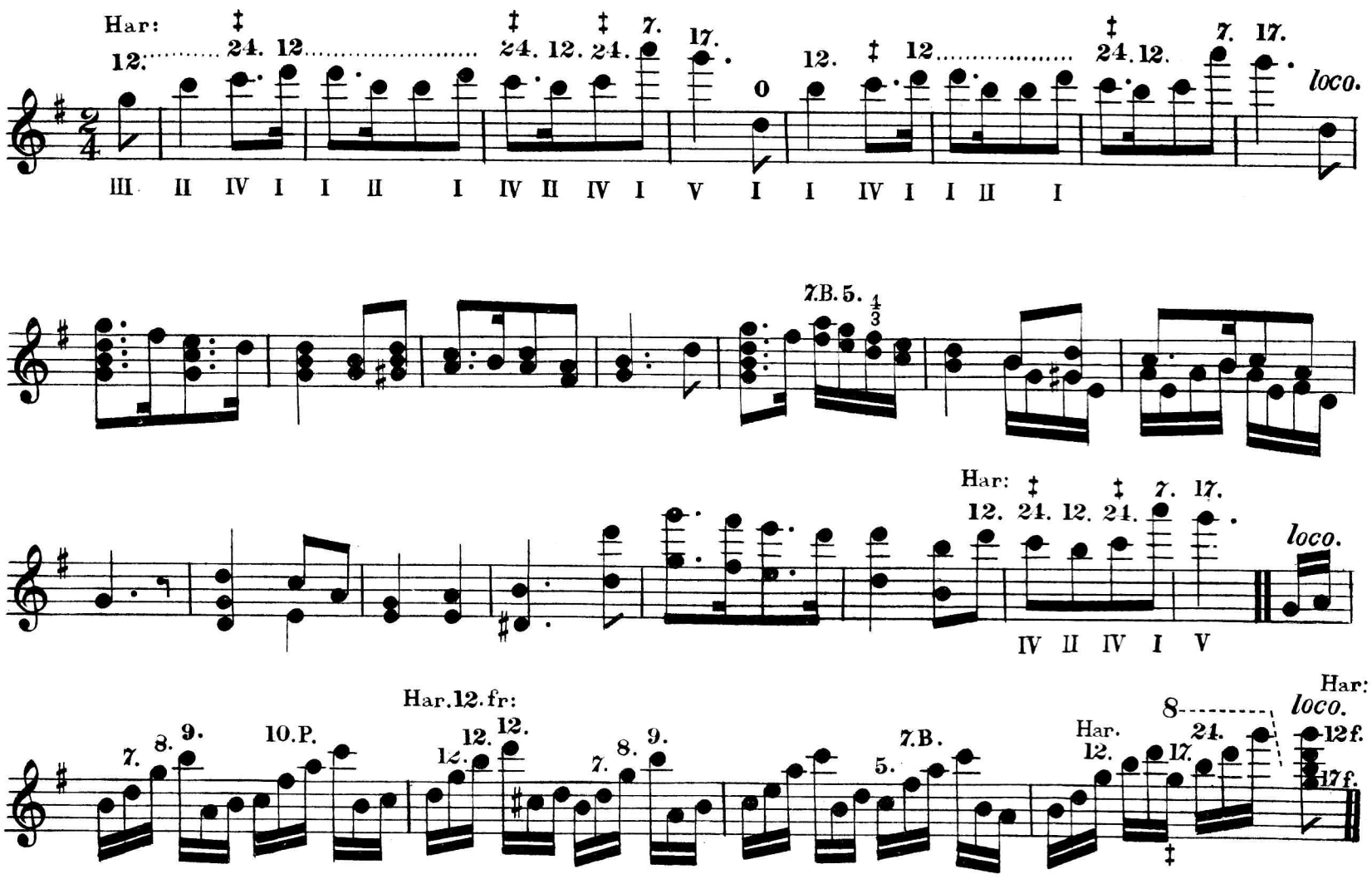
It will be noticed that the Harmonic sounds, on the 7th; and 16th; frets, are an octave higher than the stopped note would be at the same positions — those on the 5th; fret a twelfth higher, and those on the 12th; and 24th; sound the same pitch as stopped notes. On the *octave* string the 17th; and 29th; frets, give harmonics of the same pitch as the stopped note on the same fret of the first string.



EXAMPLE VII.

INTRODUCING THE USE OF NATURAL HARMONICS—Notes marked ‡ should be stopped, and struck with the *right* hand as before described. If played in the ordinary way however the same harmonic sound is produced by the 5th fret which is easier to strike if stopped with the *left* hand. The Roman numerals placed below the stave denote the strings on which the harmonics are to be played.

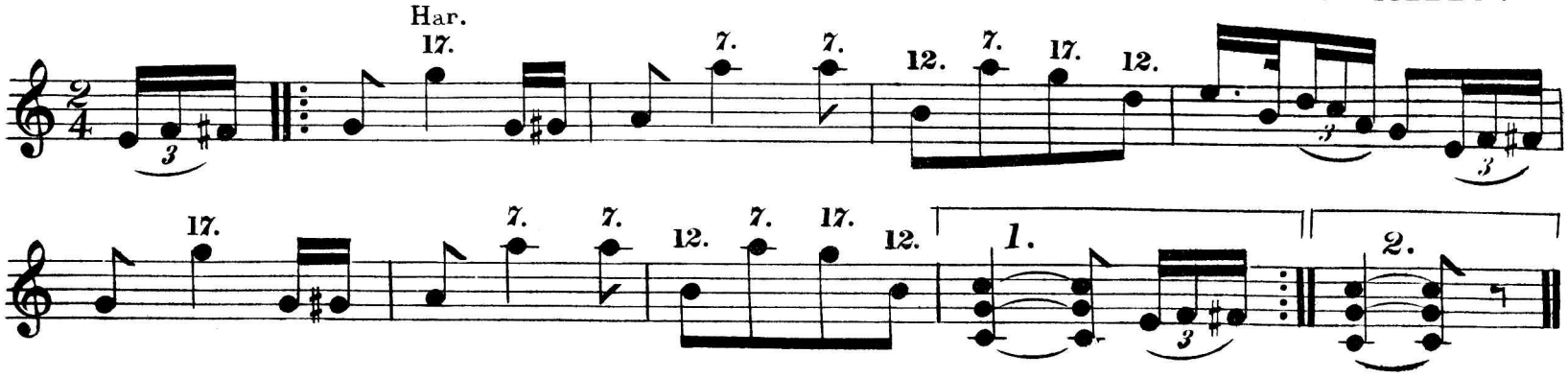
"HOME SWEET HOME."



The following extract, from the popular solo, "Queen of the Burlesque," is a good illustration of a very effective introduction of the more easily obtained harmonics.

EXAMPLE VIII.

ARTHUR TILLEY.

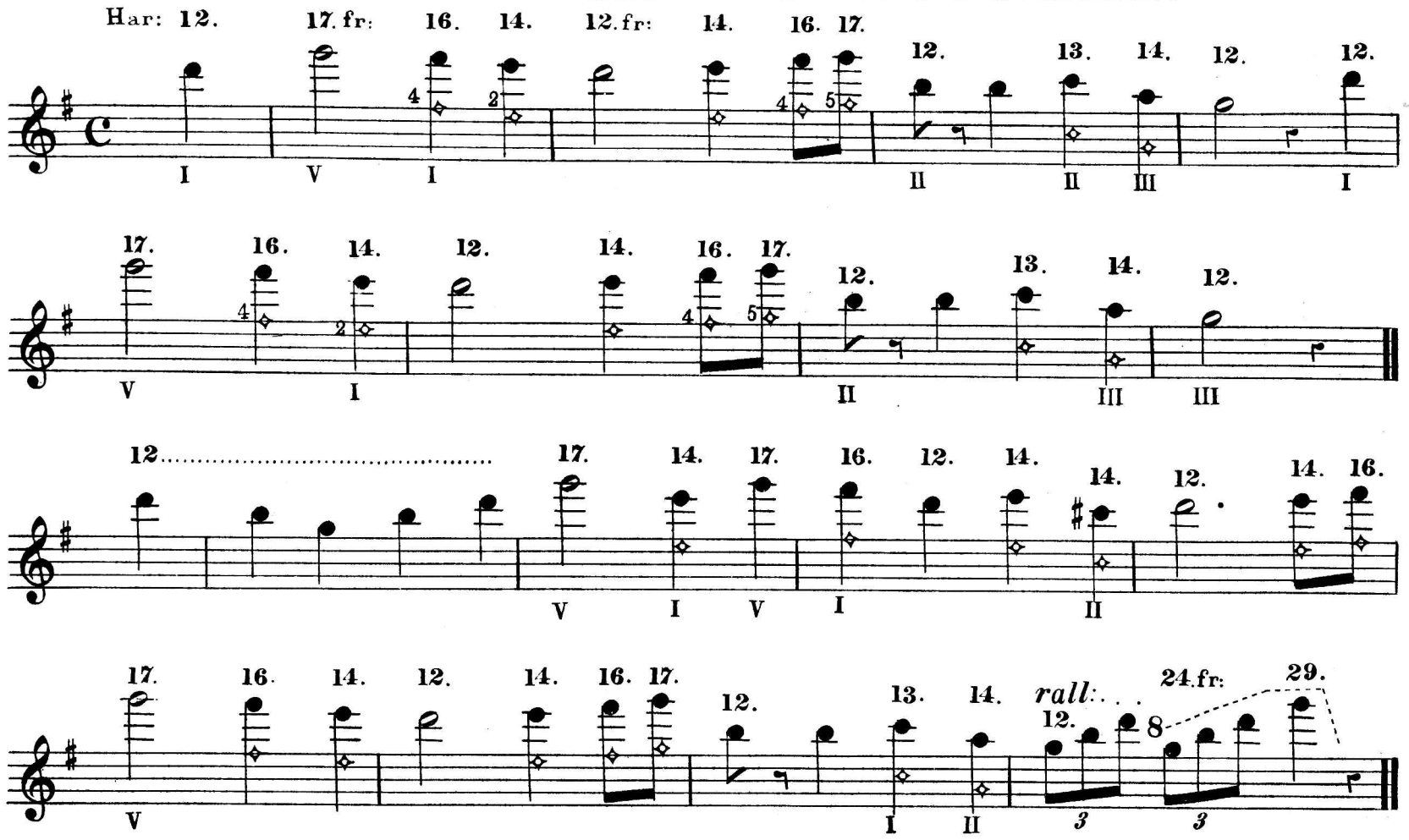


ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS—These are rather more difficult to play than the Natural, as they require to be stopped with the left hand fingers, as well as touching lightly with the fingers of the right hand, twelve frets higher on the same string. In other words the string is *shortened* by the stopping of the left hand finger. The manner of production is exactly the same as previously described—that is the first finger lightly touches the string twelve frets from the stopped note, and the thumb curled under the hand produces the note. This appears like reiteration, but as it is not generally known that harmonic notes can be produced to every note of the scale on the Banjo, as is the case with the Violin, Guitar, &c; it cannot be too clearly explained. The student *must* bear in mind that it is necessary to move the finger of the right hand from fret to fret always keeping twelve frets above the left hand finger stopping the string. Thus, a string stopped on the second fret by the left hand, would be lightly touched by the *right* hand finger at the 14th fret to obtain the required harmonic—removing the R.H. finger as soon as the note has been struck by the thumb. Some amount of practice is required to do this neatly and the natural harmonics should be well studied before attempting the following example.

Note—The lower notes are for the left hand—the upper for the right.

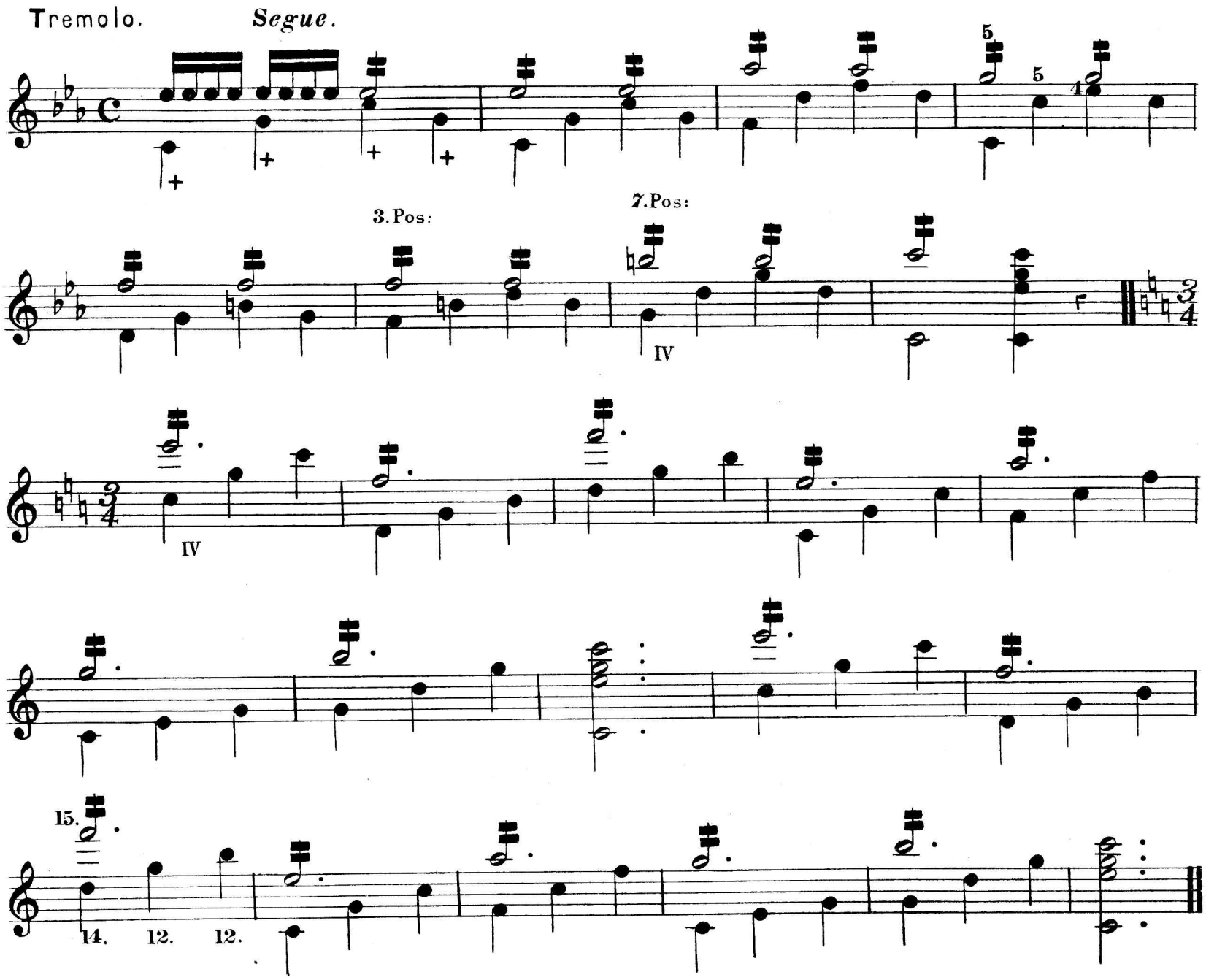
EXAMPLE IX.

"BLUE BELLS OF SCOTLAND."



THE TREMOLO _This is produced on the Banjo, by rapidly moving the point of the fore-finger of the right hand, backwards, and forwards across the string on which the note is to be played, whilst the hand is steadied or supported by the second, or fourth fingers, the thumb being free to play an accompaniment. When properly managed, this is one of the best effects that can be produced, and well repays the labour in practice. I would point out the necessity of keeping the fore-finger quite rigid— the great difficulty laying in the control of the thumb. This style of playing is generally denoted by the sign "tr;" as of a shake, but, as it is merely a repeating of one note it should be marked in the usual style of abbreviation, used for other instruments. Most instruction books give elementary exercises, but the following will be of use.

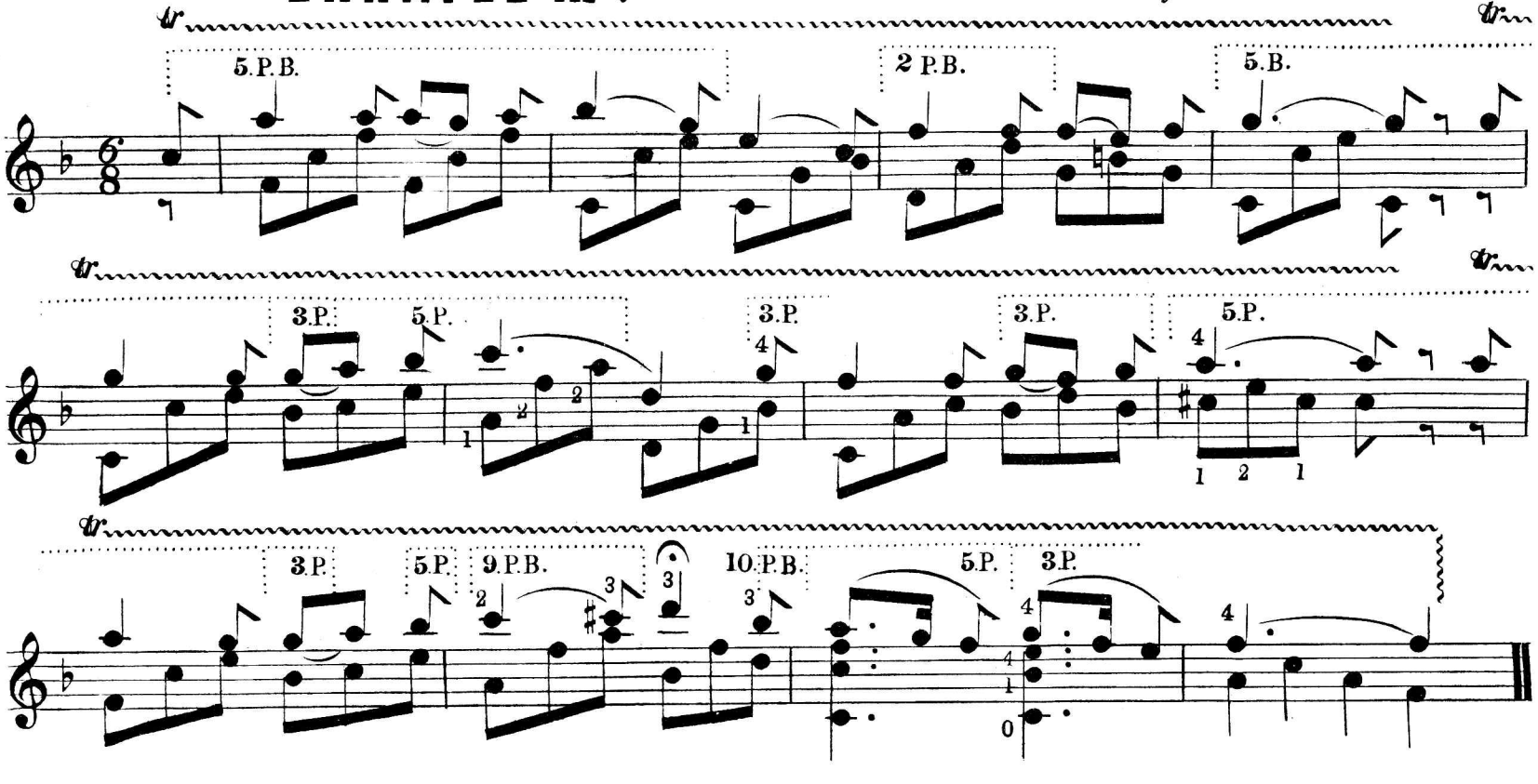
EXAMPLE X.



This style is most effectively introduced in solos where an air is arranged with variations such as "The Mill Wheel."

EXAMPLE XI.

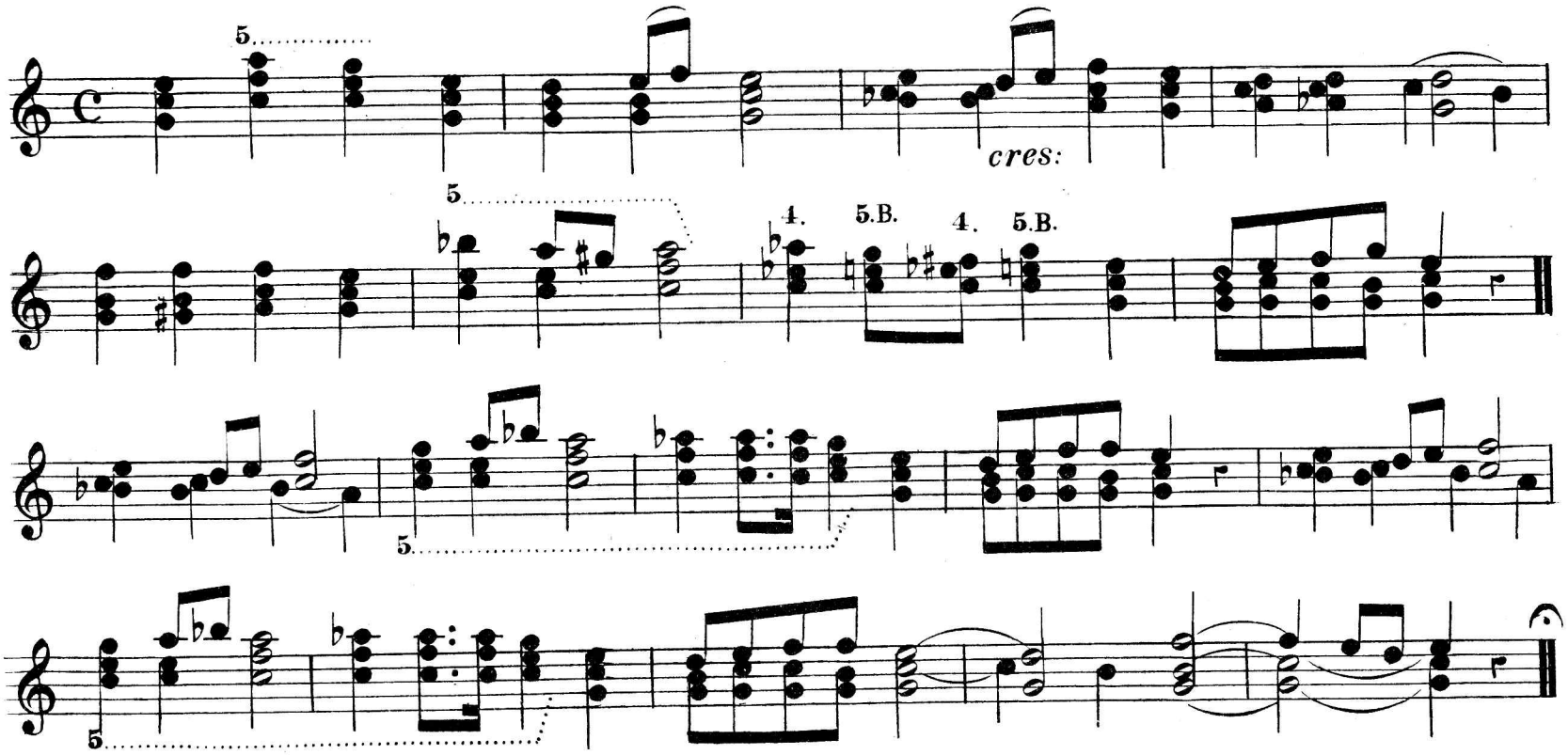
Arr: by ALBERT C. LYLES.



TREMOLO ON THREE OR FOUR STRINGS—This is simply a variation of the preceding form, the difference being that the thumb is not used—the fore-finger passing over the whole of the chord and sounding all the notes together. When playing an accompaniment also, it has a charming effect.

EXAMPLE XII. IN THE CLOISTERS.

HERBERT J. ELLIS.



PLECTRUM PLAYING—For this purpose a specially designed Banjo "Picker" is used consisting of a smooth piece of ivory or horn shaped somewhat like a heart—sharp at the apex, and at the base, pierced for the introduction of a small strip of vellum. It is held by the latter between the thumb and fore-finger of the right hand sufficently tighth that it does not move too freely at the same time care being taken that it is not too loose. It must be moved rapidly backward and forward across the string, keeping the wrist joints flexible. Avoid crossing from one string to another as much as possible by playing on the first string in "portamento" style. Each note should have its due proportions of vibration—thus, if a crotchet has eight beats or vibrations a quaver should have four, and a minim sixteen. It is best employed in slow movements, and on single notes, is pleasingly introduced in Banjo duets, or quartettes and a number of pieces have been specially composed for its special performance. The following extracts are good examples of the style. (from "The Coquette Valse")

EXAMPLE XIII.

ARTHUR TILLEY.

PICKING STYLE.

2me: Corde.....

PLECTRUM TREMOLO.

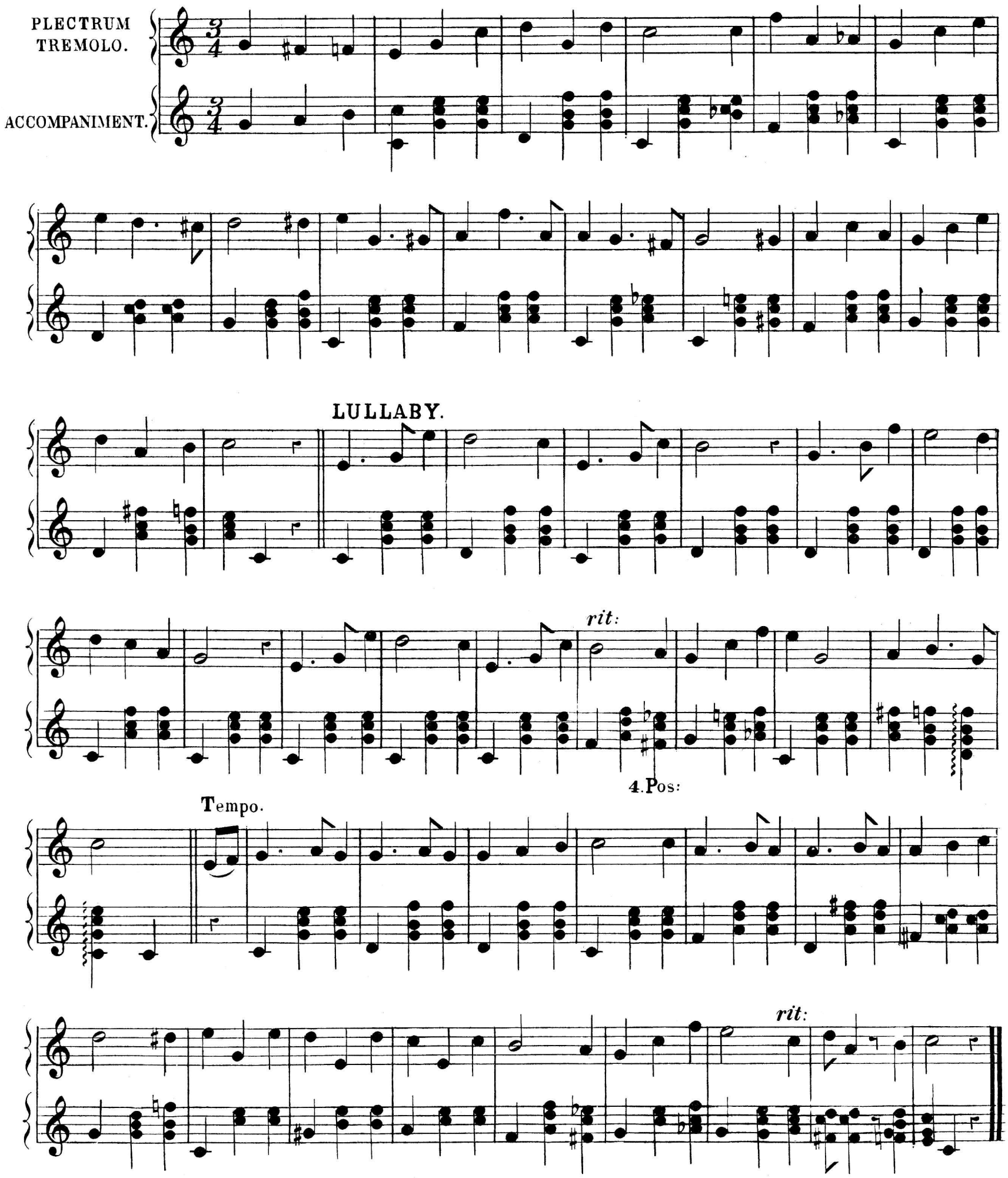
ACCOMPANIMENT.

.....*segue.*

EXAMPLE XIV.

ROCK A BYE BABY.

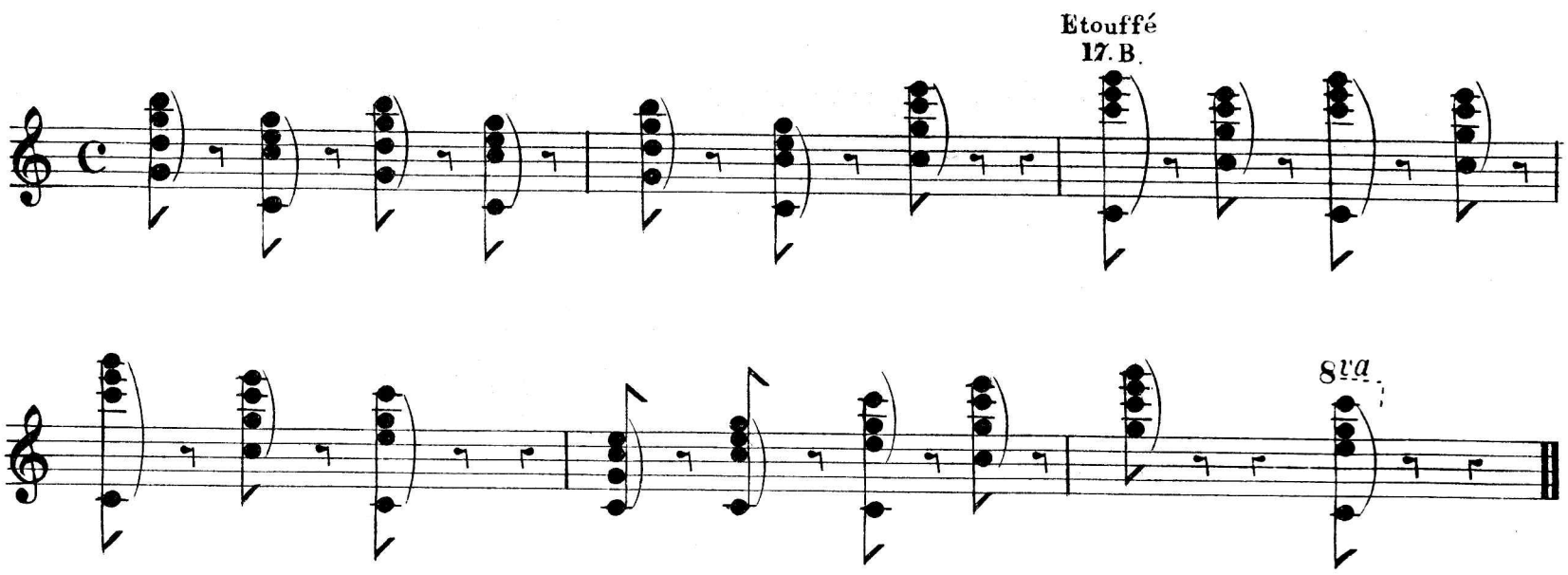
EFFIE J. CANNING.



TAMBOUR — I have adopted this title for a style of playing for its "drum" like sound. It is managed in two ways, one of which is similar to that produced on the Guitar — by the thumb striking all the strings together, but the other, and far easier method, is exceedingly simple, and when introduced in suitable passages at the will of the performer is very effective. In order to give this style, the student must place the nail of the second finger against the inside of the top joint of the thumb of the right hand — pressing hard against it, then let the finger suddenly escape striking the string almost vertically with the nail. The following example will serve as an illustration.

An effect similar to the 'Sons Etouffés' produced on the Harp, may be obtained by placing the fingers directly the notes are struck — so as to 'damp' them.

EXAMPLE XV.



THE NAILS of the right hand may sometimes be employed in striking chords in suitable passages — the fingers must be kept stiff, and must be passed backwards over the strings, commencing with the fourth finger nail on the lowest note of the chord — the other fingers following in rapid succession.

THIMBLE PLAYING is a style rather going out of fashion, as the Banjo is now acknowledged to be more of a 'musical' instrument than the solo performers of a year or so ago would have led us to believe.

This style is more adapted for accompaniments with a full orchestra as the sounds produced are decidely harsh, and unmusical, the chief advantage gained being excess of sound. When several Banjos are played together in a Band and the place of performance is large — with the addition of the accompanying orchestra however the general effect is not bad, but public taste has decided in favour of the artistic solo perfectly rendered by a talented performer in preference to the noisy efforts of many — frequently inexpert — players. It is however a matter of taste, and thimble playing has still many devotees.

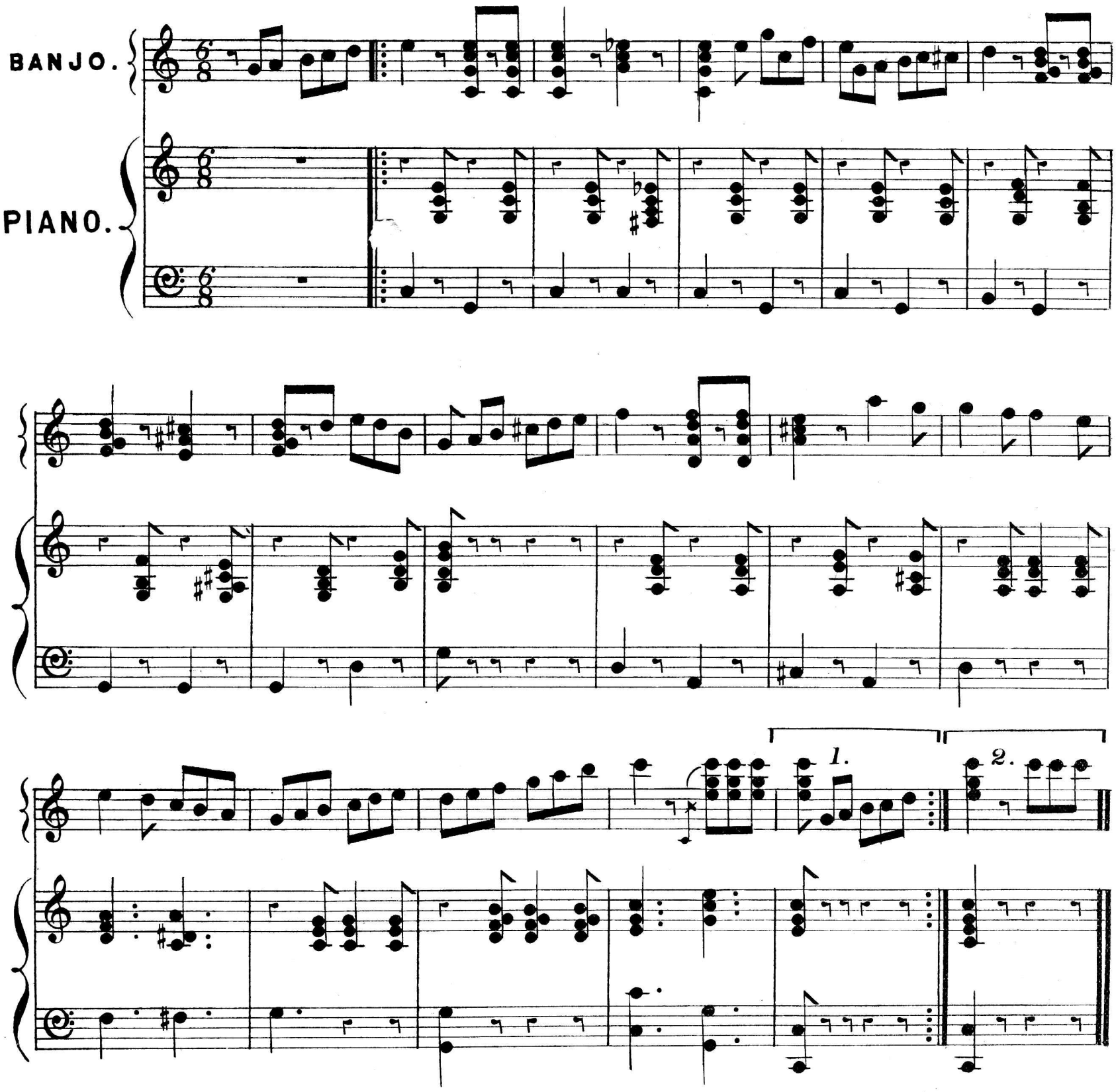
The method of playing is to strike the strings *down* with a specially constructed piece of metal covering the nail of the first finger—really an artificial nail—using the thumb for the octave string and not employing the other fingers at all. There are many compositions specially written for this style of which the following is a good example.

Most instruction books give the elementary exercises, so further are unnecessary.

EXAMPLE XVI.

"CHICAGO."
MARCH.

EDMUND FORMAN.



PORTAMENTO or **THE SLIDE** is the gliding from one note to another, on one string – in imitation of the Violin – and has, when correctly rendered, a very striking effect. It is very important to keep the finger firmly pressed down whilst sliding up the neck great precision being required to produce the proper sound. There is a distinction between the "slide," and the "slur," which should be carefully noticed. In the former the string is actually stopped (at the finish of the slide) one note above that to be struck, and this note is sounded immediately after, but in the slur there is no other note to be sounded – the vibration from that struck previously being sufficent if firmly fingered. The following will illustrate both slide and slur.

EXAMPLE XVII.

Recitativo.

Maestoso.

4me: Corde.

10. 15. 14. 12.

Slide. Slide.

3rd. Corde.

Slur. double slur. double slur.

4me: Corde.

EXAMPLE XVIII. THE WAYFARER'S WALTZ.

S. S. STEWART.

BANJO.

PIANO.

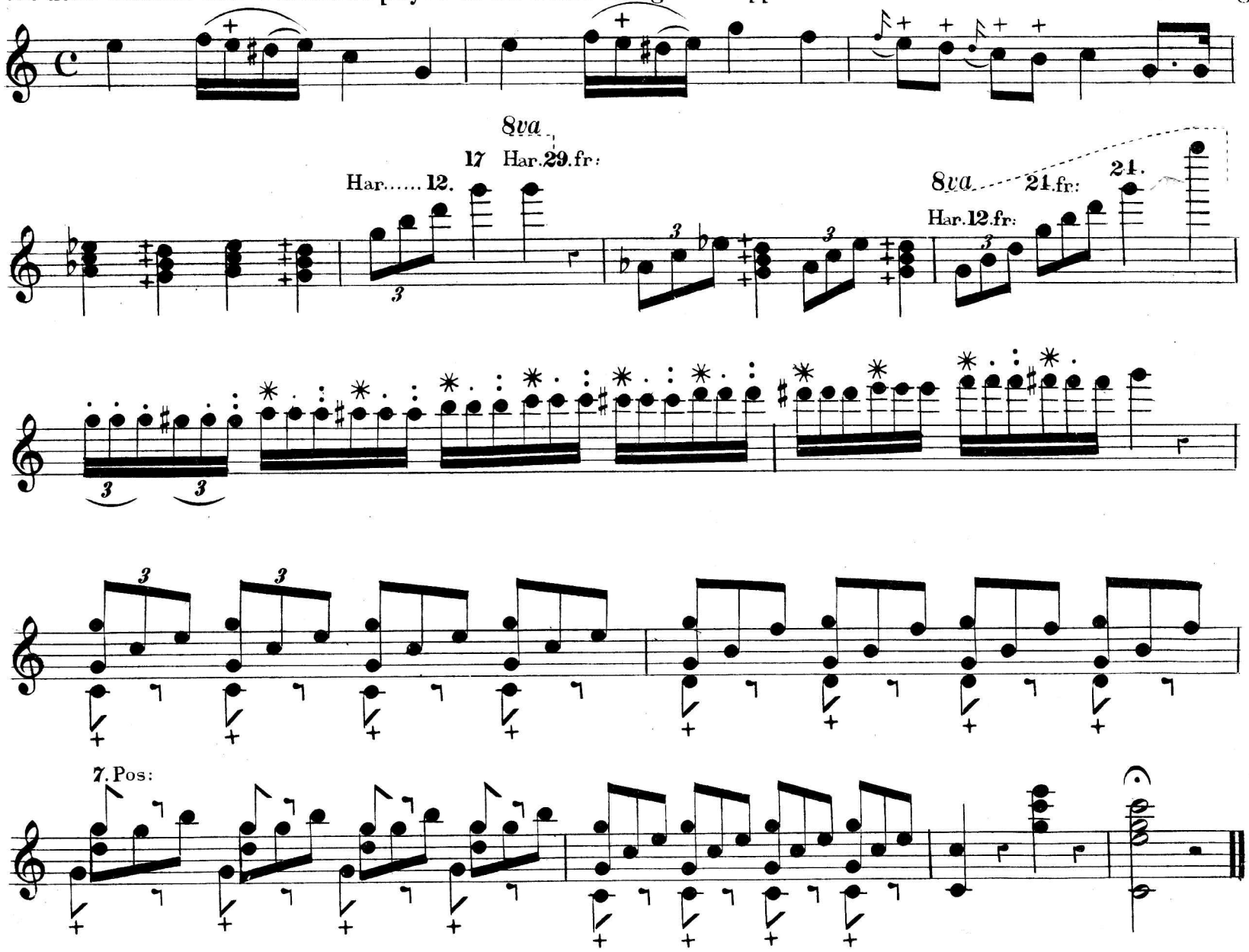
Slide. Slide.

Slide. Slide.

THE SNAP is so well known and understood, and so fully explained in the various instruction books, that it is almost superfluous to go into the matter in furthur detail. A variety of most useful exercises will however be advantageously practised taken from "Banjo Studies and Exercises" by Harry Turner, a work I would advise all players to use. The following is intended to introduce snapping, slurring and left hand Pizzacato. The notes to be played with the left hand are marked +. Slurs, are indicated by a tie, marked from the note preceeding to the slur note and played as described by bringing the left hand finger down smartly on the string, while it is still in vibration from the previous note.

EXAMPLE XIX.

All notes marked thus ✻ should be played on the thumb string and stopped with the thumb on the same fret as the 1st string.



MARTELÉ or hammered notes well played on a good instrument produce a more penetrating tone than any other method, (with perhaps the exception of those played with a thimble). They are especially effective in scale passages, and are made by the first finger only, keeping the joints perfectly straight, simply raising the finger from the knuckle joint, and pressing the string firmly down, then letting it violently escape upwards. The student must bear in mind the absolute necessity of keeping the finger straight, and pressing the string down.

THE VIBRATO or CLOSE SHAKE is another Violin effect but is also very useful on the Banjo for portamento notes just described, or when playing with the plectrum. Some players, can perform this intuitively, or by imitating other players, but a little practice will soon enable the student to master its difficulty. It is produced by a rapid and almost imperceptible movement of the finger, which stops the note. The finger practically remains in the same place, on reaching the note the vibrating effect being caused by the pressure being rapidly increased and decreased, the movement emanating from the wrist. The wrist joint should at first be moved slowly backward and forward, which will have the effect of altering the pressure of the finger on the string as well as causing it (the string) to touch the fingerboard at a different angle – thus, making a slight difference in pitch. Although the effect is not so apparent as on a Violin or other instrument played with a bow it is very necessary for a good performance of slow movements. It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that the note stopped is pressed harder to the fingerboard than usual. The following Gavotte introduces this effect. (Vibrato notes marked ~~.)

EXAMPLE XX

"JOSEPHINE"

GAVOTTE.

DUET.

NORTON GREENOP.

Primo.

Secondo.

p

4.P

2.B.

4.P.